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ABSTRACT

In 1988, the Department of Educational Leadership at Western Kentucky University (WKU) established the Western Kentucky Assessment Center, sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). This document provides an overview of the history and methods of NASSP assessment centers, followed by a discussion of costs to participating districts. Participation is recommended for districts because of the need for objective data regarding potential administrators, and the participation of practicing principals in developmental activities is identified as a critical component. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of the success of assessment centers elsewhere. (TE)

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THE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSESSMENT CENTER: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SERVICE

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THE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSESSMENT CENTER: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SERVICE

In January 1988, the Department of Educational Leadership at Western Kentucky University (WKU) submitted a proposal to the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) to establish an administrator's assessment center at the university. Final approval was granted by NASSP in April 1988, establishing the Western Kentucky Assessment Center (WKAC). The assessment center is a process, rather than a specific place within the university. The process is an attempt to identify skills that are generic to the principalship at all levels. Although developed originally for use with secondary principals, the assessment center functions equally well with elementary and middle school principals.

The assessment center is another example of the university's demonstrated committment to elementary and secondary education. The service function is of paramount importance to the university, expecially the opportunity to provide services to the public schools and their administrators.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The National Association of Secondary School Principals established the first assessment center in Virginia in 1976. The concept was developed by Dr. Paul W. Hersey, NASSP's

Director of Professional Assistance with the assistance of various experts, including members of the American Psychological Association. The assessment center concept has been validated, court-tested and is currently operated in over thirty states and three foreign countries.

Although another assessment center, the Kentucky Assessment Center, currently operates in Kentucky, the WKAC was established to meet the educational needs of the Commonwealth, especially school districts in the university's service area.

METHODS

All assessment centers are operated in similar fashion. Candidates are assessed in twelve generic skill dimensions: problem analysis, judgment, organizational ability, decisiveness, leadership, sensitivity, stress tolerance, oral communication, written communication, range of interests, personal motivation, and educational values. Simulations, in-baskets, interviews, and fact-finding activities are used to make the behavioral measurements in each skill area. Candidates are also assessed by multiple observers to insure more objective data. Data are collected, tabulated, and the results are provided to both assessees and their superiors.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

In discussing the WKAC with superintendents, they normally express several questions concerning their

involvement in the center's operation. Typically, the first question is: how much will this cost? Surprisingly, the cost is nominal, about $250.00 per assessee. The cost is especially low when compared to the prohibitive expense involved when poor principals are selected. In addition to the fee, participating districts are required to accord participating assessors time to assist administrator assessments. As many as four days per year are required, depending upon the number of assessments completed during the year.

PARTICIPATION

Should all school districts participate in this activity? Each district must make that decision individually with considerations as to need, finances and human resources. However, decision-makers, particularly superintendents should be mindful of projected principal turnover. Research indicates that over fifty percent of practicing principals are age fifty-five and over. The same statistic holds true for superintendents. If, in fact, there is a dramatic administrative turnover in the next decade, school districts must be prepared. Districts can begin now by identifying potential administrators and providing them assistance and mentoring. No process offers school districts more objective data regarding potential administrators than the assessment center concept. The process is not only recommended, but

districts are encouraged to use the center process to identify person with administrative potential.

DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES

A critical component of the WKAC is the participation of practicing principals in developmental activities. Effective schools research indicates that the principal is the key to effective schools, which requires principals to continually upgrade old skills and add new ones. Since many practicing principals were initially selected and ultimately rewarded based on their performance as administrative managers and not instructional leaders, the WKAC offers LEADER 1, 2, 3. This program was developed by NASSP to provide practicing administrators training in conceptualizing and practicing instructional leadership.

Similiar programs, such as Springfield, help principals manipulate targeted strengths and weaknesses which may have been identified follwing praticipation in the assessment center. Other components, such as oral and written communication, are currently being field tested and will be incorporated when available. The developmental components of WKAC are critical to the continual development of positive principal behaviors.

FUTURE

Does the assessment center work? Research and the courts say yes. Validation research, especially at Michigan

State University has proved conclusively that the assessment center measures accurately the skills of potential administrators, and the courts have agreed. Does it work in Kentucky? The Kentucky Assessment Center operated by the University of Louisville for the past two years has reported very positive response. The comments from school districts using the service is yes, the process does work in Kentucky. How can you find out more about the process or the WKAC? School personnel desiring more information should call the WKAC at Western Kentucky University (502) 745-4997.